Interesting Chat and Stage Gossip for Playgoers

Willard Mack Discusses The Art of Good Acting

Says He Is Delighted Because the Critics Approved of Him in "Gold," and Promises Never To Be a Bad Actor Again if He Can Help It

By Harriette Underhill

Willard Mack is delighted because the critics approved of him in his new play, "Gold." It is such a pleasure to know people who come right out and say what they think when they think anything, which some people apparently do not do, sometimes. Mr. Mack is young and enthusiastic and filled with the joy of living, and such a sense of humor as that man has! Some anonymous writer has intimated lately that we didn't know a sense of humor when we saw one, but we do. It is what Willard Mack has. Every time we have interviewed Mr. Mack we have spent about two hours with him, discussing extraneous things and having the time of our life; so when we went back stage after the opening performance of Eugene O'Neill's 'Gold" it was with the full intention of remaining until midnight, or else persuading Mr. Mack to hurry off his make-up and drink his after-theater coffee with us.

And Now Eddie Foy Appeared in the Offing

As it happened, we did neither one. Eddie Foy had beaten us to it. When we got to the dressing room he was there and had already persuaded Mr. Mack to go with him to the Lambs or some other manly place which no Louis heel is allowed to desecrate. Personally we didn't think a family man like Mr. Foy should be out so late, but he couldn't get our viewpoint, and said to hurry up and talk and he would wait. You know how it is when any one says "Hurry up and talk." It's like saying "Now, go ahead and have a good time." It spoiled all our fun, and we couldn't think of a thing to say, but Mr. Mack could. It takes more than that to make him speechless.

"Do you like the play, and how do you like me in it?" he asked, just as though he was hanging breathless on our answer. That's another nice thing about him.

"Rather" and "splendid" we replied. "The best thing you ever did."

"What a stunning frock you have on! That's what the critics thought, too, wasn't it? Best thing I ever did. I tell you, it certainly made me happy to reach what the critics said about me, and I should rather have had it in this play than in any other of recent years. That certainly is a smart gown. I like black. I'll tell you why I was particularly anxious to have the critics like me in 'Gold.' It is because I put time and thought on the part, and if it had been a bad portrayal I should have felt that I had done my best and failed. Polly wears black a lot, too, you know."

And Always Speak Gently to the Critic

"Then you are not one of those actors who have a supreme contempt for the opinion of the critic?"

"I should say not! I don't say that a critic can always tell a good play when he sees one, but he certainly can tell good acting when he sees it. He is trained to detect the slightest false note or gesture. And don't you think that the actor doesn't know full well the justice of the criticism when he gets it. When a critic points out the weak spot in your performance it is the spot which you yourself knew to be faulty. It was the spot where you weren't sure of yourself. An actor cannot portray what he does not know. If he hasn't studied at close range a policeman or a murderer or a Chinaman or a sea captain or a gentleman how can he play him? That's why George Cohan is a great actor. He knows everything and everybody. Of course, one must have the knack of impersonation, but first and foremost one must thoroughly understand the thing he is trying to imitate. The reason there are so many bad actors isn't because they are careless or don't want to do any better. It is because they haven't lived, that's all."

"Well, no one could say that you haven't lived, even if they do tell you occasionally that you are a bad actor."

"Ah," said Mr. Mack, smiling pleasantly, "that sounds natural."

"Polly again?" we asked expectantly, but he ignored this and returned to the subject of dramatic critics.

Has Always Been In a Breathless Hurry

"You know I've never really had a fair chance before. Every play I've been in I've written or directed or staged, and I've had every man's part to look after and have had to be general understudy and assistant property man, and I've never had a chance to give any thought or preparation to a part. The critics mostly said I was bad, and I didn't blame them. I was doing the best I could, but I wasn't acquainted with my part. So I made up my mind I'd try a lone hand and I put the best I had to offer into this Captain Bartlett of the good ship Tri-zon.

"Heywood Broun said it was the best thing I'd ever done, and now if I can only get George Jean Nathan to say I'm good my cup of happiness will be full. He is a difficult person to please, and the worst of it is that when he roasts you you always know he is right."

"He has a heart of gold," we replied. "Divorce him from his pen and you'll find that he is as young and as good-natured as he looks. Cheer up."

"Well, if he approves I can say 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' and can take my vacation in Alberta with a light heart."

"Going to Alberta?" we asked, "where the Royal Mounted come from?"

"For the summer, and then in September I'll stop in California and get Polly and come back to New York." And here Mr. Foy said "Hurry up," and Mr. Mack said, "Don't hurry," but we said "Good night" without asking a word about "Polly."

"Come and Trip It as You Go"

Theodore Kosloff has a good-sized dancing class of film celebrities. Among them are Bessie Love, Gloria Swanson, Lila Lee, Eileen Percy, Pauline Starke and Marjorie Daw.

The Evolution of a Star

Nora Bayes

Heading the conglomeration of nonsense entitled "Snapshots of 1921," which the Selwyns and Lew Fields are presenting at the Selwyn Theater, are three stars whose gifts of travesty and song have endeared them to the heart of America as only those who are able to make the world laugh are ever endeared. They are Nora Bayes, Lew Fields and De Wolf Hopper.

Taking singly their respective evolutions from obscurity to their present stellar positions in the theater, we begin with Nora Bayes, although it is a difficult matter to discover the period in the life of this entertainer when the word "obscure" could be appropriately applied to her.

For Nora experienced few of the hardships which commonly attend the career of an artist. As a little girl in Chicago the exceptional quality of her voice was recognized wherever it was heard, and it soon became apparent that her method of "putting over" a song was unique. From infancy the career of Nora Bayes has been a triumphal march to the deepest recesses of the heart of her public.

It began in school, when her irrepressible fun captivated teachers and students alike, nor is there to-day any abatement in the abandonment to the pure spirit of fun with which she gives herself in the absurd travesties of the Selwyns' "Snapshots of 1921." Throughout this new revue Nora Bayes laughs loudly and disrespectfully at life and at the people who take human experience in too serious a manner. The public might long ago have resented being kidded had not the inimitable comedienne "kidded" herself with an even keener sense of the ridiculous than that which inspires her informality with her audiences.

Not What She Sings, But How She Sings, That Counts

Miss Bayes's ability to establish an understanding between her audiences and herself has been as great a factor as her singing in building her great popularity. Although her success has been associated with the Ziegfeld "Follies" and many other revues, it is in vaudeville that the irrepressible Nora became best known.

It was in vaudeville that she first gained the attention of entertainment seekers, making her first professional appearance on the stage of the old Olympic Theater in Chicago some fifteen years ago. There she attracted attention as a singer of songs. It was never what Nora Bayes sang but how she sang it that counted. Whatever she was given to do, it came from her touched with her rare gift for travesty. It never mattered how inconsequential the song—if Nora sang it it "went over." From "Down Where the Wurzburger Flows" and "Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?" to the greater triumphs of her own productions, the songs given the public by Miss Bayes have become instant hits because they were stamped by the peculiar and inimitable methods of the great comedienne. These methods have caused her unqualified adoption by the American public and the delight which this public has taken in her "kidding" whether of it or of herself.

It's Her Fourth Comic Alliance With Lew Fields

After her first vaudeville experience Miss Bayes betook her comedy to the Fisher Stock Company in San Francisco. After that engagement she went to Europe for a three-year period of study. Returning to America, she was engaged for the first edition of the "Follies." This was in 1907-'08. Having assisted to start this revue on its career, Miss Bayes allied herself with Sam Bernard and his "Nearly a Hero" production, but when this was done she went back to the "Follies" for another period of tickling the risibilities of the Ziegfeld public. Her first association with Lew Fields was in "The Jolly Bachelor." Her second appearance with him was in the all-star cast which opened the Forty-fourth Street Theater, which comprised Marie Dressler and Frank Daniels, besides Miss Bayes and Lew Fields. The third association with Fields was in "The Sun Dodgers" and the fourth now represented by "Snapshots of 1921."

After her appearance in "The Sun Dodgers" Miss Bayes betook her rare gifts to the Winter Garden for a period. Then came her own first production, entitled "Two Hours of Song," at the Thirty-ninth Street Theater. In the two-hour duration of this piece Miss Bayes sang 144 songs. It was while sponsoring this production that George M. Cohan one day telephoned Miss Bayes that he had just written "a little thing" which he would like her to help him "put across." That "little thing" was "Over There," and it went across with a popularity so great that it was heard all over the world.

She Followed "Over There" All Through the Southern Camps

"Over There" so endeared Nora Bayes to our soldiers who were just then entering the war that she followed it with unselfish service, singing through an entire summer in Southern camps.

In her own productions, "Two Hours of Song," "Ladies First" and "Her Family Tree," Nora Bayes proved herself a producer capable of maintaining that same intimate touch with her audiences which she has achieved in her rôle of star. In both capacities it has been her buoyant spirit of fun, her irrepressible tendency to burlesque life, her ability to impress the world with her feeling of loving comradeship toward it, which are responsible for the position she holds on the American stage.

May McAvoy Makes First Appearance as Film Star

When May McAvoy, five feet tall and weighing less than a hundred pounds, first appeared on a Broadway screen The Tribune reviewer predicted a brilliant future for her. The little girl had all the marks of a real star of the screen. Beauty, grace and some acting ability were hers. And she filmed as few of our greatest stars can film. Lights and shades played about her wonderfully modeled head and cleanly chiseled features until one hardly realized that it was a motion picture. She was one of the very, very few persons apparently born for screen work.

The second time The Tribune reviewer saw May McAvoy it was at the Criterion, where the little novice had the rôle of Grizel in Sir James M. Barrie's "Sentimental Tommy," that delightful production by John S. Robertson of Barrie's two stories, "Sentimental Tommy" and "Tommy and Grizel." Then the little girl had made great strides in her profession. She was not only the rare beauty of the screen. She was an accomplished and finished actress. And she was only eighteen.

What Miss McAvoy Has Done in Two Years

To-day May McAvoy makes her first appearance as a motion picture star, with a play written especially for her. The picture is "A Private Scandal," and it opens at the Rivoli Theater. Hector Turnbull wrote the thing especially for her, taking into account the personality of the newest light of the screen world.

May McAvoy has accomplished it all in two years. Her rise in her profession is a lesson to the thousands of girls who seek success on the stage and in the movies and go back with the report that only pull can bring a girl to the electric lights of Broadway. Miss McAvoy had no pull. Two years ago she started out as a child model for an advertising agency, which used her lovely features to adorn a sugar advertisement. She stuck to this work for six months or more and then decided she wanted to go into motion pictures. She didn't ask for a big part and she didn't get one. A little bit here and a bigger bit there, but only little parts came her way for a long time. Sometimes there were weeks and weeks without anything, but she stuck to her purpose.

Finally, after a year and a half, her chance came. Mr. Robertson, one of the most eminent of American directors, the man who created the film version of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Mr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," with John Barrymore in the title rôles, selected her for the part of Grizel in that most charming and most difficult of comedies, "Sentimental Tommy." But let Mr. Robertson tell his story.

Had Beauty and Talent; Technique Came With Work

"In all the years that I have been on the stage and worked as a director of pictures I have never known a girl so eager to learn and so willing to work to satisfy that eagerness. We all know girls who are eager to learn, but so many never get beyond the expression of that eagerness. May McAvoy used to live around the studios. When she wasn't acting she was watching the older actors and actresses, learning the little tricks of walking, of standing up and sitting down, of expressing an emotion without too much apparent effort. She was always studying something, always glad to be corrected and always quick to grasp any suggestion. She always had beauty and talent, and the technique came quickly because she worked."

That Miss McAvoy may get away to a good start, Hugo Riesenfeld has built an unusual program of music and films around his feature picture.

Original Hungarian Tunes Used in Production of "Liliom"

Some day you may be startled with a snatch of song to the effect of "Look out, here come the damn police, the damn police, the damn police!" But don't jump and grab your hip or make some other break. It will be only someone who has been to "Lilion," which the Theater Guild is presenting to crowded houses at the Fulton, and cant' get this tune out of his head.

The music is all Hungarian and was used in the original production in Budapest and again in the revival of "Liliom" at the Burg Theater in Vienna. However, it did not come directly from Europe, but after a lapse of years and through a messenger.

Joseph Schildkraut, who plays the title rôle of the roughneck, was the only one who had seen the play. He was anxious that the music of the original be used in the Theater Guild production. Since it was too late to expect its arrival from Hungary, Mr. Schildkraut volunteered to hum all the music from memory to some one who could write it down and arrange it for orchestration. Deems Taylor, the So-So, whose comment at the piano delighted the audience of "A Man About Town," offered to coöperate. The result of Schildkraut, Taylor & Co.'s collaberation is heard during the heaven scene, whenever the thieves sing, whenever the heaven theme is introduced by the heavenly policemen, and between the acts.

All the music is by the Hungarian composer Humperdinck, except the thieves' song, "Look out here comes the damn police." The music of this is an old Hugarian folk-song, whose lilt is haunting but difficult for wording. When the direct translation of Molnar's words for the song were tackled, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Schildkraut discovered that they were singing a very Irish refrain. The words twisted the notes out of their nationality, and to prevent this the translation had to be retranslated. The present version is more than satisfactory, to judge by the enthusiasm with which Joseph Schildkraut sings it in the play and out of it.

Educational Films to Make Two-Reel Feature Pictures

Educational Films promises a series of two-reel picture dramas made from stories of famous authors and featuring famous stars. Two of the stories, on which work has already begun, are "The Wilderness Mail," a James Oliver Curwood story, and "The Policeman and the Baby," from the story by Clarence L. Cullen. Besides Curwood and Cullen, the authors from whose works the stories for the rest of the series will be chosen include Sir Gilbert Parker, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Winston Churchill, Hallie Irminie Rives, Randall Parrish, General Charles King.

The Picturesque Career of James Barton, Comedian

Co-Star of "The Last Waltz" Came From Stock and Burlesque; Has Traveled With Carnivals, and Even River Steamboat Shows

James Barton, who brings a comic genius to the rôle of the bogus Grand Duke Hubenstitch in "The Last Waltz," the Oscar Straus operetta, at the Century Theater, is a product of the burlesque and vaudeville houses. He has played in all parts of the United States, dancing with this show, impersonating the tramp with that, clowning as the spirit moved him, and the spirit moved him pretty briskly and continuously.

It is just such a career that has made him the versatile comedian that he is to-day. He can do almost anything, from knockabout stunts to character portrayals. Life has held hard struggles for him. It was only by sheer pluck and hard work that he was able to force recognition of his talents and prepare for himself a conspicuous place in the Broadway sun.

From the time he was five years old until to-day—he is twenty-nine—Barton has earned his own living. Often it was a most precarious living, attended by hardships of all descriptions, with never a place that he could really call home. School was an experiment more than a habit, his education being picked up in fragments in whatever town he happened to be settled for more than a week's stand.

James Barton was born in Gloucester, N. J., a little town near Camden, that happened to be the place where his father and mother were playing an engagement. Coming of a theatrical family, he was destined from the start for the stage. His grandfather was manager of the old Front Street Theater in Baltimore. That city sheltered him for a longer period than any other place. He lived there off and on for eight years. But he really called no place home, though he lived for various periods in Philadelphia, Newport News, Norfolk, Savannah, Atlanta and Jacksonville.

In Burlesque When Five Years of Age

When he was five years old he made his début with Billy Watson's "Beef Trust" company, at the old Buckingham Theater in Louisville. His father, Jim Barton, was a comedian with the troupe, and his mother was merely traveling with the company. Not long after he entered vaudeville with his mother in a song and dance act. They booked their own time, playing any theater and any town that they could.

This continued for a few years. Meanwhile young Jim was perfecting himself in all styles of dancing. Dancing was the mainstay of the cheap vaudeville and burlesque wheels, and the youngster and determined that there was no step that he could not master with sufficient application. When he was nine years old he made a great hit at the Howard Theater in Boston with an imitation of Joe Welch.

With another boy, named Dave Osman, he formed a song and dance team when he was fourteen, under virtually the same booking arrangements that prevailed when he was appearing with his mother. They were glad to pick up business wherever they could, accepting engagements at summer parks and in summer stock companies as a "specialty team." When young Barton obtained an opportunity to play dramatic roles with a 10-20-30 stock company in Newport News he left his partner. He was then sixteen. The next year found him a member of a company presenting "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and other old favorites on boats that plied up and down the Pamlico Sound in North Carolina. He played at different times several rôles in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," including Marks, Simon Legree and Topsy. And many nights, he says, he had to play all three.

And Again In Vaudeville

For the next four years he continued his varied career in vaudeville and stock companies. And in 1913, when twenty-one, he joined a company presenting "Peck's Bad Boy." It was a fly-by-night organization that managed to exist only by means of stupendous faith in Providence. The manager was one of those men who was accustomed to say when asked for salary, "Don't tell the rest I'm paying you." Such an order only prompted Barton to rush to his associates shouting, "I got mine!" whereupon a general scramble took place in the direction of the box office.

Barton played Schultz, the grocery-man in "Peck's Bad Boy." The company had reached Fort Scott, Kan. There it happened that the manager told him that they were heading for the Coast. Barton decided he had had enough, and with a fellow actor, named Johnny Barry, he quit. They framed an act, picked up a few vaudeville dates in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and other cities and gradually worked their way to Philadelphia, where they split. Barton obtaining in the mean time an engagement in comedy stock at Hart's Theater, in that city.

In 1914 he was asked by Jeannette Dupree to be the principal comedian in "Her Own Big Show," which she was putting out on the "progressive" burlesque wheel, and he accepted. He was now making more money than he ever had and the future looked rosy until the world's series came along. Then Barton picked the wrong team—the Athletics—and he lost all that he had made during his season. Next he joined the late George Clark's American wheel show, "Hello Paris," in which he impersonated a tramp and a Jew and displayed his skill in acrobatic dancing. The next two seasons found him the featured comedian with the "Twentieth Century Maids."

At this time he attracted the attention of the Shuberts, and they offered him an engagement in "The Passing Show of 1919" at the Winter Garden. Barton bade goodby to burlesque. He had finally reached Broadway. He had the principal comedy rôle in the Winter Garden revue, and made a hit by his resourceful clowning and his exceptional eccentric and acrobatic dancing. After a season on tour in "The Passing Show" he was summoned to take the leading comedy rôle in "The Last Waltz," in which he has won a secure place.

There is no doubt of it—James Barton has arrived.